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SIGHT-TESTS: THEIR AIMS AND HOW TO PREPARE FOR THEM

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Much at various times has been said about sight-reading and the necessity of teaching our pupils to read Latin literature instead of merely reading set tasks. Since the Commission of Fifteen met at Cleveland and recommended that a sight-passage be set on every examination paper in Latin which has a passage from the prescribed reading, this question has assumed great importance and calls for careful and serious consideration.

My aim in writing this article, however, as a high-school teacher and a member of that commission, is to show that, while our ultimate object is to learn to read Latin literature without the aid of grammar and lexicon, in only four years of high-school work with ordinary pupils this cannot be expected; secondly, that the four years' training in the study of Latin is exceedingly valuable, though we may not in that time learn to read Latin literature readily; thirdly, that sight-tests and sight-reading were recommended by the commission, not for the purpose of supplanting the time-honored thoroughness and drill in the syntax and structure of the Latin language, but as a means of securing a more rational and serviceable knowledge of these very things by improved methods of teaching.

This age of progress in science, government, and education has aroused the masses of the people to great mental activity; to a consideration of the means by which great things have been accomplished and by which also even a greater and ever-expanding progress may be continued. All this has created great discussion, which, however, in weaker and less thoughtful minds sometimes degenerates into mere agitation. Discussion is always helpful; agitation confuses and weakens a great cause. The processes of education in schools and colleges have been greatly improved, and

the aims and standards of education have been raised, by earnest and thoughtful discussion. We who have a vital interest and an active participation in the progress of education must see that the cause of education may receive no detriment from thoughtless agitation.

I sometimes fear that the position of Latin in our courses of study is more in danger of being weakened by the unguarded statements and criticisms of its friends and advocates than from any other source. Many enthusiastic Latinists think that we should teach our pupils to read Latin literature, to speak and think in Latin; and they say that, if we do not attain this object, the study of Latin is not worth while and may as well be given up. Now, while this high aim should ever be kept before us as the goal toward which we are working, we must not be expected to reach that goal too soon. We must not be goaded on by unreasoning masters nor be set to make bricks without straw. We will enjoy our tasks and receive pleasure and profit on the way. Let the child enjoy the rainbow though he do not reach the pot of gold.

Others, who have an enthusiastic fondness for Latin syntax, may deplore the tendency of the teaching of those whose aim is merely to read extensively with little regard to syntax or accuracy. These extreme views and the disparaging criticism of one party by the other should be lightly heeded by those who arrange the courses of study and by those who set the examinations in Latin. Each school of critics must look at the efforts and aims of the other with more sympathy and appreciation. It is interesting and profitable to note that almost every practice or belief that one race or people in the world has adopted as necessary or commendable some other race has condemned; and what one race has condemned some other has approved. Again, any people or party or organization can thrive under and profit by criticism from outside; or by sound and healthy criticism even from within. But when an individual or party or organization begins to doubt the wisdom of its own course of action and takes to a moody and despondent criticism of itself, the end is decline or suicide.

The ability to read Latin readily can only come from a more

extended course in the college or the university. In the high school we should aim to give such instruction that those pupils who go to college shall receive the best preparation for the more rapid reading of Latin in college, and those who go no farther than the high school shall enjoy their work and at the same time receive the best possible training.

I sometimes fear that our colleges are dominated too much by the spirit and aims of the university, and so they wish the high schools to prepare boys to do work adapted to the university. Not the too great demand in any one subject, however, but the demand for extended preparation in too many subjects is now fast getting to be the intolerable burden placed upon the high schools. The college must not expect all subjects even to have been begun in the high school. It must be content to teach some subjects from the foundation, and for a time at least in other subjects to continue the same teaching and training which the young men have received in the high school. Teaching rather than investigation should be the work of the college. The university may well devote a part of its energy to research and original investigation. The college can do but little in this direction, and the high school should not, directly, aim at originality. Strictly, all knowledge is relative. Learning is drawing conclusions from related things. All knowledge and individual power come primarily from imitation. Improvement on what we imitate is our only originality. You cannot teach originality or force genius. In time originality will reveal itself and mature by the exercise of the individuality of its possessor. Thought begets thought. The genius is one who sees new relations in thought or the operations of nature; the former becomes the author, the latter the inventor. Education gives food to both. The proper digestion of the food is the work of the individual. We often hear it said that we must teach our pupils to think. Very true. But the first process is to give them something to think about. Parenthetically, I would like to say right here that one fault in the teaching of English is that we too often try to teach young pupils to express their thoughts clearly, elegantly, and forcibly, before they have any thoughts to express.

But, to keep to my subject, Nature will take care of digestion in a healthy body if proper food is given in the proper quantity at the proper time. In our endeavor to educate the boy we must not try to overfeed, or to give an adolescent youth what is adapted to an adult person. We must not expect maturity from immaturity. To sum up my whole thought in a word, we cannot expect boys, especially before the last year in the high school, to develop much power, judgment, and self-reliance in sight translation. But to say that boys cannot be expected to learn to read Latin literature freely and unaided in the high school is not to say that they should not be required under the guidance of the teacher to practice reading at sight Latin properly graded. This practice should begin very early and should be kept up. The one thing to be kept in mind is that the teacher must be ever ready with sympathy and suggestion to help in time of need. And all sight-tests must be adapted to the stage of the pupil's progress.

I hope I have made clear what, at first thought, might seem inconsistent or paradoxical: that boys cannot be expected in the high school to acquire the ability to read Latin literature freely at sight, and that they should be required throughout the whole high-school course to read at sight Latin properly graded and adapted.

The commission by recommending that a sight-passage should be set on every examination paper in Latin did not intend to supplant or overthrow, but to improve and rationalize, the time-honored methods of teaching Latin. The new scheme of examinations, as far as it effects a change, will give the most progressive teachers more freedom in their range of reading and in their methods of teaching, and will leave the more conservative teachers free to read about the same parts of the same authors as hitherto; from both it will demand effective teaching. The results of the examinations will show which method proves most efficient and satisfactory.

To learn a living language by association with those who speak it is one thing; to learn a dead language like Latin, to understand its syntax and laws of development so as to read the language with a conscious appreciation of its syntax and structure, is a very different thing. The former has little to do with education; the

latter is one of the most valuable educative processes. Latin, though a dead language, is a very live subject under a live teacher. The meaning and choice of words, the force of syntax, the proper grouping of words and clauses, force and elegance of expression, historical and classical allusions—in short, grammar, rhetoric, literature, psychology, government, history, mythology—are all taught by the classical method, and make the four years' study of Latin in the high school very valuable. Though one may not in that short time learn to read Latin literature readily and easily, a boy who has mastered the syntax and feels a conscious progress in his ability to read Latin intelligently rarely fails to show pride and enthusiasm in his study. Progress is the key to success and satisfaction in any undertaking. The greatest hindrance to progress, and to satisfaction and delight, therefore, in the study of Latin is unwillingness on the part of too many pupils to study with patience, discrimination, and persistency the principles of syntax. Such pupils master nothing and so begin the work of translation by guessing at everything. And the person who guesses in translation generally guesses wrong and makes absurd blunders. Then, to avoid being laughed at, he resorts to all sorts of devices and tricks to make a show in recitation. He attempts to rely on the help of his schoolmates or printed translations. Hence the imperative necessity of sight-tests to show the teacher what pupils are doing honest and efficient work, and how far all his pupils really understand what they pretend and seem to know. Sight-tests are for all pupils a true gauge of progress and efficiency; rightly graded and adapted, they give zest and encouragement to the faithful student, while to the cheat and the sluggard they show the necessity of learning the language itself and the folly of trying to invent ways merely to make a respectable show in the recitation. All sham and pretense and conceit are revealed by a test at sight.

Again, if in class we read and review, and keep reviewing, a book of Caesar or a speech of Cicero, the pupil may become so familiar with the reading that the rapid translation is largely due to a partial memorizing of the English. This partial memorizing of a speech or a campaign or a poem by repeated and rapid translation is of great value, and should not be disparaged or neglected.

But a passage thus made familiar by repeated reviews is no sure test of a pupil's mastery of syntax or his ability to read Latin. Many pupils, too, learn the trick of answering questions about syntax and of reciting rules without the least idea of their application. Sight-tests furnish the quickest and surest way of showing pupils of this class the error of their ways. But it must not be inferred that sight-tests are merely devices for detecting fraudulent and wrong habits of study; they furnish the faithful student the best evidence of progress, and show him what he needs to study most in preparation for his daily recitation. The student needs to be impressed with the idea that the preparation of his lessons is to him what daily training is to the athlete—a training for a supreme test of power later—and that it is as absurd for him to use a “trot” as it would be for a runner in preparation for the Marathon race to ride daily around the race-track in an automobile.

But we must consider the limitations as well as the advantages of sight-tests. I think all will admit that sight-passages afford excellent tests of power and efficiency. But, that the test may be fair to the pupil, not the words only but the ideas contained in the passage must be somewhat familiar. Many passages of Latin literature, though not very difficult in construction, contain ideas or allusions which a boy of immature experience and limited reading does not, and cannot be expected to understand. The boy before such a test is like the seaman in a fog. The mariner may know how to manage the machinery of the vessel in the difficult situation and yet not know whether to advance will bring him nearer to, or carry him farther from the right course. Not to move at all is then sometimes the safer way. So the boy may know his grammar and be able to construe the words of the difficult passage, yet the thought based on some strange mythology or ancient custom is to him obscure and misty. He hesitates bewildered. Before his master he stands like an ox before the butcher, dumbly waiting to be slaughtered.

I therefore know of no duty on the part of a teacher of Latin that calls for more deliberative judgment than the task of selecting a suitable passage for a sight-test. A passage for sight-transla-

tion should not contain words, forms, or constructions that the pupil has not had. Nor should it contain words, though used before, which have new or unusual meanings. If new words, except some regular derivatives, occur, or words with a new or special meaning, the meaning should be given on the paper. But even this should be avoided as far as possible. For an ambitious boy's conscious ability and commendable pride of success are lowered by every word translated for him.

The most suitable passages, especially for less advanced students, may be taken from some later portion of the text that is being studied. For a class reading the first book of Caesar, for instance, a passage should be taken from some later chapter of that book or from another book of Caesar. A sight-passage from Nepos should not be given to a class that has read nothing but Caesar. Many passages from Sallust are appropriate for classes reading Cicero's orations against Catiline; and some passages from Ovid can with justice be set for classes reading Vergil. It is sometimes well to make up a passage by combining sentences taken from several different chapters. Sometimes a change of construction in some of the sentences may be advisable, or even necessary, to secure a suitable passage. From an almost reverential regard for the ancient text, classical teachers have hesitated to make any changes in the text even for purposes of teaching. But sight-tests and sight-reading often make such changes advisable. Of course, when we rearrange and reconstruct Latin sentences, great care must be taken to avoid making mistakes. And only teachers of a pretty confident mastery of the language can or should attempt to do this. Incidentally one great gain in requiring sight-work is to induce teachers to acquire a wider knowledge of Latin literature and a more conscious and rational knowledge of the syntax, structure, and idioms of the language, so that they may become more efficient instructors. Teachers who have very little knowledge of Latin themselves will not presume to teach their pupils to read Latin at sight. But this is not said to cast reflection upon young teachers who cannot read Latin literature freely and easily. Many experienced and efficient teachers cannot do this. In fact, almost none of us can do this

as we would like to do. Yet all Latin teachers should by constant practice keep working toward the goal.

Again, many pupils of excellent ability but of a sensitive nature cannot do themselves justice at sight-translation, just as some able and learned men cannot make a speech extemporaneously even in their own language. So passages from prescribed reading combined with sight-tests are necessary to a fair and safe judgment of a pupil's real ability and progress. The very best examination includes a passage from the prescribed reading, questions on syntax, Latin composition, and a sight-passage.

But I know many teachers will naturally be asking how they shall prepare their classes for sight-tests and sight-translation.

Let it be remembered that sight-translation is not different from any other translation. Sight-reading is not a magic art or the mysterious work of wizard or enchantress. One can read Latin at sight only in proportion to his understanding of the words, phrases, idioms, order of words, and syntax of the language. Therefore I say that the way to prepare a class to translate at sight is to teach in the best way possible vocabulary, idioms, order of words, and syntax. These can be taught partly by intensive drill on these very points and partly by extensive reading. To emphasize the need of these two processes was the aim of the commission in recommending the new requirements and the new method of examinations. The intensive drill should come first. Then the two processes should go on together. In the first three years I would rigidly insist on a thorough drill in the syntax, idioms, and order of words, which by the way are, I think, most effectively taught through daily practice in composition based on the work which is being read. Gradually the drill in syntax and composition may be lessened and the reading at sight may be increased till finally the extensive and easy reading is possible and the main object. The proportion of time and energy devoted to the two processes in the earlier years will differ somewhat according to the ideas of the instructor. Personally I am inclined to insist upon the persistent drill on syntax and idioms in the prepared work, especially during the first two or three years. Therefore I would have more of the preparatory reading pre-

scribed. But the plan of the Commission of Fifteen was a most happy solution of the whole difficulty. For any teacher who prefers to confine himself to the traditional prescribed reading can still do so. No one is compelled by the new requirements to change in the least from the authors and works usually read, while those who want to roam a little wider and change from year to year have a broad range from which to choose. Those who think the best way to learn Latin is by persistent drill on syntax first will be likely to follow pretty closely the old prescribed reading; those who think the only object in studying Latin is to learn to read the literature and that the quickest way to reach this end is by much and rapid reading will devote more time directly to sight-reading and will wish to read a greater amount. I believe a thorough drill in the syntax and structure of the language is very valuable both in itself and as a basis for an intelligent reading of the literature.

If a class has been trained to an intelligent and working knowledge of the grammar, neither the teacher nor the pupil need fear an examination. Provided the passages for composition and sight-reading be judiciously selected, as I have indicated above, the pupil will obtain about the same mark in syntax, composition, and the sight-test. I have proved this statement over and over again by the examination of many classes for many years. The statement holds true even of pupils who have not read any Latin at sight in the class. So I say the way to prepare a class to read Latin at sight is to see, and insist as far as possible, that every pupil reads every prepared lesson faithfully, conscientiously, intelligently, and upon his own responsibility. Of course every pupil will not do this. But this should be the object aimed at by the teacher. Just so far as this object is attained, just so nearly the teacher has attained perfect success. Perfection is the goal to strive for, though ne'er attained.

But to read an ancient language like Latin one must have some knowledge of the history and customs of the ancients and their range of ideas. But, someone will say, this requires a liberal education. Most certainly. A knowledge of the history, the social and religious customs, and the ideas of the ancients can be

obtained only by long study and extensive reading. And for this very reason we do not—we cannot, and we must not be expected to—prepare boys in four years to read Latin literature freely at sight. A pupil should be required to solve problems in algebra at sight. But he should not be expected to solve problems involving quadratics when he has studied only simple equations. So a boy cannot be expected to translate idioms which he has never seen or to understand a passage in Latin when the ideas even are to him unfamiliar. Therefore great caution and judgment must be exercised by those who set sight-passages for entrance examinations in Latin. They must not expect too much, and they must see that the sight-tests, not only in vocabulary and idiom, but in range of ideas, are adapted to the proficiency which can reasonably be demanded of high-school boys who have studied Latin only four years. Our task in the preparatory schools is so to train and direct our pupils that they will work toward the desired end, which is to read Latin intelligently and appreciatively. To this end it is desirable, but not imperative, that we should practice sight-reading in class. Of the two alternatives, however, it is better to read critically and intelligently the prescribed text with little direct effort at sight-reading than to attempt to read much loosely at sight, with little or no regard to accuracy. Sight-reading can generally, in the high schools, be much more successfully practiced in the second half of the year. After the class has read Caesar for a half-year and has become somewhat familiar with the vocabulary and style, the last ten or fifteen minutes of the recitation period may be spent in reading some one of the easier chapters in the later books. Toward the end of the year half the period, and occasionally the whole period, may well be spent in reading at sight. The same general method may be followed with the classes in Cicero and Vergil.

To prepare pupils for sight-reading we must teach syntax in such a way that it may be a help toward understanding the language. Many pupils can recite the rules of syntax fluently and yet know nothing whatever about the relation of ideas which is the basis of syntax. When we learn from the grammar the rules for the dative, for instance, it is well to select for sight-translation

several short sentences in which the dative occurs, and to make up several short sentences in English to be turned into Latin requiring the dative. When a boy can translate correctly Latin idioms and constructions, and can correctly turn into Latin simple English sentences illustrating those idioms and constructions, the teacher can cease to ask questions every day about those particular points. It is better to concentrate the attention on a few constructions till they are mastered than to attempt to ask in a perfunctory way the same set of questions day after day, receiving the same meaningless answers. Why is it necessary to ask every day the reason for the simplest subjunctive? The pupil looks back over the page and says that the subjunctive is after *ut* denoting purpose. The teacher may think that the boy understands what he has said, and puts down a high mark for a ready answer. But perhaps in the next sentence the boy comes to *ut dixerat*, which he translates, "that he might have said." Is it any wonder that such a boy fails in every sight-test and quails before the simplest exercise in Latin composition? Instead of asking why *dicant* is subjunctive in the sentence *Caesar legatos mittit qui dicant*, ask the pupil to substitute *u* for *a* in *dicant* and then translate.

Vocabulary, another essential to sight-reading, must be learned partly by special effort and partly by extensive reading. Words like *bellum* and *gladius*, which can always, or usually, be translated by one invariable word in English, present no serious difficulty. But to understand such words as *ratio*, *indicium*, *monumentum*, etc., requires a knowledge of derivation and the formation of words. Hence much more attention should be given to the study of word-formation. Before leaving the high school a boy should know, from the derivation, the meaning of such series of words as these: *pascor*, *pabulum*, *pabulor*, *pabulator*, *pabulatio*; *nosco*, *nomen*, *nomino*, *nominatio*, *nominalis*, *nominatim*; *rigeo*, *rigesco*, *rigidus*, *rigor*; *ubi*, *ubinam*, *ubivis*, *ubique*, *ubicumque*. One great essential in acquiring a knowledge of such words as *ratio* and *consilium*, which are to be variously translated, is to get at the root meaning, and learn how to trace from that the developed meaning, which is revealed by the context. *Ratio* from *reor*,

"think" or "reckon," means a thought, thinking, reason, reasoning, reckoning, an account, list, idea, plan, scheme, system, desire, consideration, etc. *Consilium* means consultation, counsel, advice, plan, design, purpose, resolve, determination; or the power to plan, shrewdness, discretion, wisdom; or a body of counselors, a council, jury, etc. By analogy what must *indicium*, from *indico* [*ins-dico*], mean?

Before a pupil can read Latin at sight some special idioms and some peculiarities in the order of words and clauses must be understood. The use of the relative before the antecedent and the use of *primus* or *princeps* agreeing with a subject trouble most boys. So either the same day, or the day before, the class reaches the sentence in Caes. i. 12: *quae pars civitatis Helvetiae insignem calamitatem populo Romano intulerat, ea princeps poenas persolvit*, it is well to write on the board some such sentences as these: *Caesar primus flumen transiit*, "Caesar was the first to cross the river"; and *qui puer celerrime ambulabit is maturime domum perveniet*, "which boy walks the fastest he will reach home the soonest," or "the boy who," etc. Let the pupil see that *quae pars* corresponds in position to *qui puer*, *ea* to *is*, and *princeps* to *primus*; then he will translate the sentence correctly. Without some such special preparation I never knew a boy to translate correctly the sentence in Caes. i. 30: *iure iurando ne quis enuntiaret, nisi quibus communi consilio mandatum esset, inter se sanxerunt*, "they bound each other by oath that no one should announce it except those who should be authorized by common consent." The use of *quibus* with the impersonal passive, the omission of its antecedent, and the pluperfect subjunctive standing for the future perfect indicative of the direct discourse may be illustrated by some such preparatory sentences as these: *tibi credo*, "I trust you," *tibi creditur*, "you are trusted"; *qui iniuriam fecit non diligitur*, "he who has done an injury is not esteemed"; *si arma tradideris, tecum pacem faciam*, "if you will give up your arms, I will make peace with you"; *dixit si arma tradidisses tecum se pacem esse facturum*, "he said that if you would give up your arms he would make peace with you." A few days ago a pupil reading at sight came to Verg. iv. 90: *Quam simul ac tali persensit peste teneri*

cara Iovis coniunx, and could go no farther. Evidently the use of the relative at the beginning of the sentence referring to the previous sentence caused the trouble. So these three sentences were written on the board without any comment, and the pupil at once translated the sentence correctly: *Quod ubi cognovit; quam simul ac sensit; quam simul ac persensit venire.*

Of course, to be ready to illustrate peculiar idioms, syntax, and order of words with suitable examples requires much reading and preparation by the teacher. But work hurts nobody. Success is the alchemy which transmutes dull toil into coins of pleasure. The successful hunter heeds not the toil of hunting and keeps himself well supplied with ammunition. Like Diana of old the successful teacher will keep his quiver full of arrows. Preparation and equipment are not only required for efficiency and success but they command respect. Did not Homer say in ancient times that the people revered Apollo when they heard the arrows clang upon the shoulders of him as he went along?

To sum up briefly what I have said, sight-passages are the surest tests of honest work and power. But these tests must be given with strictest care. And they must be adapted in vocabulary, idioms, and ideas to the proficiency of the class. As a preparation for sight-tests, sight-reading is desirable but by no means indispensable. Thoroughness, and mastery of vocabulary, syntax, idiom, and order of words in what is read in regular course is of paramount importance. Lastly, I hope more effort will be made to secure the ability to read Latin at sight. But I also hope that there will be no stampede in a wild endeavor to reach some Eldorado or Klondike where we expect to secure the rich treasures of Latin literature with little digging. For, if so, the golden dreams of many elated enthusiasts will be like those night dreams in which we seem to fly at ease o'er verdant hills and dales, and from which we wake to walk again, as every day before, the rugged path of toil.